

much. If we add all the Medicaid changes the HELP Committee anticipates, it increases the Federal deficit by more than \$1 trillion at a time when we are already spending about \$500 million a day on interest on the national debt so far this year—\$500 million a day in interest on the national debt so far this year. It too would kill jobs by requiring businesses to either insure all of their employees or pay a tax if they do not. It would levy a tax on those Americans who don't have or cannot afford health insurance. It also fails to reform malpractice laws. It spends billions of dollars on projects unrelated to the crisis at hand. It forces millions of Americans off of their current plans—forces millions of Americans off of their current plans—despite repeated assurances from the administration that it does not. And like the House bill, it creates a nationwide government plan that could lead to the same kind of denial, delay, and rationing of care that we see in other countries.

Health care reform is vital but it is not easy. If the House bill and the HELP bill are any indication, it is certainly not something that should be rushed. Both bills are too expensive, particularly for small businesses and seniors. They are too disruptive of the health care Americans currently have, and they are ineffective in addressing the health care problem in its entirety.

Americans have a right to expect that we will take enough time on this legislation not to make the same mistake we made on the stimulus. The House and Senate bills we have seen this week show we are not there yet, not even close. We need to slow down and let the American people see what they are getting into with these so-called reforms. We all want reform, but we want the right reform.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. CORKER. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to a period of morning business for 1 hour, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each, with the time equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees, with the Republicans controlling the first half and the majority controlling the second half.

The Senator from Tennessee.

HEALTH CARE REFORM

Mr. CORKER. Madam President, I rise to speak about where we find ourselves today. This is a momentous time in our country's history, as all of us in both bodies on both sides of the aisle find ourselves focused on the issue of health care reform. In the middle 1990s, I had the tremendous honor of serving the State of Tennessee in a position that allowed me to oversee the State's Medicaid Program and many other programs in our State that focused on the needs of many of the underserved. Since that time, I have been convinced that we, all of us, have a moral responsibility to do everything we can to ensure that Americans of all walks of life have the opportunity for affordable, quality private health insurance.

I have probably attended 50 meetings in the last 90 days working with others toward that end. I am convinced that there are at least 90 people in this body who share the goal of ensuring that Americans of all walks of life have the opportunity for affordable quality health care. It is my hope that we will end up with a bipartisan solution.

I have been disappointed in the results, though, of legislation that has come forward thus far. My sense is that the House of Representatives is promoting a bill that does not meet the mark. The HELP Committee just passed out, on a party-line vote, a bill that, again, does not meet the mark. What concerns me is there are so much that we could agree on, yet we tend to focus on what is out of bounds and does not take us to the place we would all like to be. It is to that end that I rise to talk about this issue.

All of us know that our country has seen unprecedented debt levels. The leader of the Senate Republicans just spoke about that issue. The President in some ways found himself in this place, but on the other hand, since being in office, he has accumulated debt on top of debt for future generations. All of us understand that our biggest obligations exist in entitlements, with Medicare and Social Security. Most of us thought, as we came into this Congress, that one of our major focuses would have to be to get entitlements under control so that while we are doing this unprecedented short-term spending, which I oppose, at least the world community would realize we are trying to tackle our long-term obligations so they would continue to buy our bonds in order that we could go on here in this country.

I hoped strongly we would focus on that, and last Congress we had a bipartisan bill, by the way, supported by Republicans and Democrats, to do that.

What has happened, though—and this is pretty unfathomable to me—is that during health care reform, what has been focused on is Medicare, which has a \$38 trillion unfunded liability, a program where the trustees have said that

it is insolvent and is going to go into the hole in a huge way in 8 years. What is being discussed in this body, and what has already been agreed to by many on the House side, is taking money from Medicare, a program which is insolvent, one that, instead of taking money from, we should be trying to make solvent, but we are taking money from that program to create a whole new set of entitlements that will add incredible amounts of debt to our country's balance sheet.

It is almost unfathomable to believe that people in this body would be looking to make a program that is insolvent even more insolvent by leveraging it to create another program.

For that reason, because I know the Finance Committee is in meetings, in small groups but also as a committee, to try to figure out a way to solve this health care problem—and it is my hope that they will do it in a way that makes sense, in a way that builds bipartisan support—I have delivered today to the majority leader a letter signed by 35 Senators making this body, making the President aware of the fact that we will not support further jeopardizing the Medicare Program by using it to leverage a new entitlement. It is my hope that in delivering this letter, while we have 35 signatures at this moment, there will be more added. While these are all Republican signatures, I actually think there are many on the other side of the aisle who question leveraging an insolvent program for a new program. I have delivered this letter in the hopes that the Finance Committee, the leadership on the Democratic side of the Senate, and the President will seek a solution that is different than taking money from this insolvent program that aids our seniors to create a new entitlement.

One of the most discouraging issues is, it is my understanding—and I hope I am wrong—that the folks who are talking about using Medicare money to create a new entitlement are not even dealing with SGR. Every 18 months, we sit down and discuss the doc fix. Doctors all across the country call us wanting to make sure that their payments are not going to be cut by 21 percent this year. So each year we kick the can down the road and solve that for a year, year and a half, because of budgetary constraints. It is my understanding that what is being discussed at this moment is taking money from Medicare, leveraging a new program which will add increasing debt, and not solving that problem even during the 10-year budget window this legislation will deal with.

Again, I have attended every meeting I have been asked to. I went to the White House yesterday. I met with a bipartisan group last night. I believe that this country does need to figure out a way so that all Americans can access affordable quality health care. I know all Americans are concerned about the cost of health care. I stand here as one Senator committed to